

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
Fourth Sunday of Advent
2020—B Cycle



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For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

Opening Prayer

(edited for use here)

The angels announced to the shepherds:

"Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those
on whom his favor rests."

Let there be peace on Earth!
I pray that hearts united
in love across the world
might find a path to peace.
Especially, I pray that peace will thrive
and find a home in my own heart.
Let there be peace on earth,
and let it begin with me! Amen.

Listen: "[Let There Be Peace on Earth](#)," sung by Vince Gill
Written by [Jill Jackson Miller](#) and Sy Miller.

Introduction to the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Second Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16 “David said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Look, I live in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God is housed in a tent.’”

Responsorial Psalm 89: 2-5, 27, 29 “I will sing forever, O Yahweh, of your love.”

Romans 16: 25-27 “Now is revealed the mysterious plan, kept hidden for long ages in the past.”

Luke 1: 26-38 “Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you.”

Introduction

“While Christ remained hidden in Mary, his rest was *tremendous activity*; he was making her into himself, making himself from her. From her *eyes* he was making the eyes that would weep over Jerusalem, that would shine upon the wildflowers, that would close in death and open in the morning of the Resurrection. From her *hands* he was making the hands that would heal and raise the dead and be nailed to the cross. From her *heart* he was making the heart whose love would redeem the world.”—[Caryll Houselander, *The Passion of the Infant Christ*](#)

— *What impresses me most about Houselander’s insight into Mary’s “Advent”?*

— *What do I learn from the author about the often-lost spiritual meaning of this special Season? About the purpose of my life as a Christian?*

— *How will I use my hands, my eyes, and my heart this week to make a positive difference in someone’s life? And in the world?*

A Reading from the Book of Samuel (7: 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16)

“When King David had settled in his (new) palace and Yahweh had rid him of all his surrounding enemies, he said to Nathan, the prophet, ‘Look, I live in a house of cedar but the Ark of God is housed in a tent.’

“Nathan replied, ‘Do as it seems fit to you for Yahweh is with you.’

“But that very night, Yahweh’s word came to Nathan, ‘Go and tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh says: Are you able to build a house for *me* to live in?’

“Now you will tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh of Hosts says:

“‘I took you from the pasture, from tending the sheep, to make you commander of my people, Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, cutting down all your enemies before you. Now, I will make your name as great as the name of the great ones on earth. I will provide a place for my people Israel and plant them, that they may live there in peace. They shall no longer be harassed, nor shall wicked men oppress them as before. From the time when I appointed judges over my people Israel, it is only to you that I have given rest from all your enemies.’

“Yahweh also tells you that he will build *you* a house. ‘When the time comes for you to rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your son [Solomon] after you, the one born of you; and I will make his reign secure.’

“I will be a father to him, and he shall be my son. If he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod, as men do. But I will not withdraw my kindness from him as I did from Saul when I removed him out of your way. Your house and your reign shall last forever before me, and your throne shall be forever firm.”

Personal Reflection

King David had a well-intentioned concern for the inadequacy of Yahweh’s *physical* dwelling place in Jerusalem (compared to his own palace). Yahweh’s response through Nathan was, in plain English: “I don’t need a temple-house, but if you’re determined to build it, go ahead. I won’t stop you.” In fact, David did not build a temple. Solomon did.

— *How aware am I that God’s most desired dwelling place exists not in what I construct over my lifetime (home, family, career, business) but at the core of my own being?*

— *How would a stranger entering my residence sense that I am a person of faith?*

— *How have these Advent reflections helped me to focus on my inner life?*

Responsorial Psalm (89: 2-5, 27, 29)

God’s magnificent promises

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

I will sing forever, O Yahweh, of your love,
and proclaim your faithfulness from age to age.

I will declare how steadfast is your love,
how firm your faithfulness.

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

You said, “I have made a Covenant
with David, my chosen one;

I have made a pledge to my servant.

I establish his descendants forever;

I build his throne for all generations.”

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

He will call on me, ‘You are my Father,
my God, my Rock, my Savior.’

I will keep my Covenant firm forever,
and my love for him will endure.

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Personal Reflection

List the “magnificent promises” of God in the above verses: _____

— *How do I personally experience God’s steadfast love for me? How do I see that same steadfast love in my spouse, children, partner, others in my household?*

— *Who in my life today manifests as God’s “rock” and “savior”? How do I recognize that in this person (or these persons)?*

— *What external and—possibly—internal threats am I aware of that test my enduring love for my God? What is my typical response, when I sense that my “enduring love” for God shows signs of wavering?*

From St. Paul’s Letter of to the Romans (16: 25-27)

“Glory be to God! He is able to give you strength, according to the Good News I proclaim, announcing Christ Jesus. Now is revealed the mysterious plan, kept hidden for long ages in the past. By the will of the eternal God it is brought to light, through the prophetic books. All nations shall believe the faith proclaimed to them. Glory to God, who alone is wise, through Christ Jesus, forever! Amen.”

Personal Reflection

First-century Rome’s combined Jewish and pagan converts struggled to build a vital faith community of mutual love and respect. Still today, Catholics of different cultures and backgrounds experience the challenge of forming mutually caring parish communities.

— *How do I, like St. Paul, promote a positive partnership among the different ethnic and theological factions in my local parish? What more could I be doing?*

— *What might St. Paul be proud of in our 2020 Catholic Church worldwide? In my own local parish?*

— *Looking back over my life, especially as I grow older, how do I recognize signs of God’s ongoing “mysterious plan” at work in my life?*

— *How do I sometimes stifle the wisdom of the Holy Spirit within myself? In others around me? What will I commit to today to encourage one member of my family?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Luke (1: 26-38)

“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth. He was sent to a virgin, betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the family of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

“The angel came to her and said, ‘Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you.’

“Mary was *troubled* at these words, *wondering* what this greeting could mean.

“But the angel said, ‘Do not fear, Mary. God has looked kindly on you. You shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call him Jesus. He will be great and shall rightly be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the kingdom of David, his ancestor. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever, and his reign shall have no end.’”

“Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be since I am a virgin?’”

“The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the holy child to be born of you shall be called Son of God. Even your relative, Elizabeth, is expecting a son in her old age, although she was unable to have a child; and she is now in her sixth month. With God *nothing* is impossible.’”

“Mary then said, ‘I am the handmaid of the Lord, *let it be done* to me as you have said.’”

“And the angel left her.”

Personal Reflection



“The Annunciation”
by [Sandro Botticelli \(1489\)](#)

— *As I study the above masterpiece carefully depicting the annunciation . . . it says to me*

— *What might Mary have responded if the angel added, “Oh, by the way, Mary, before giving me your answer, there’s something Yahweh wants you to know. When this child of yours grows up, he’ll be despised and ridiculed . . . even by members of your own family and religion. Then they’ll execute him as an enemy of the Jewish faith and a danger to Roman rule”?*

— *What if God had forewarned me about the future of my children and/or loved one’s lives? What difference might it have made in my life choices?*

Listen again to [“Mary, Did You Know?”](#) sung by [Clay Aiken](#), with lyrics by Mark Lowry in 1984, and music by Buddy Greene in 1991.

— *Would I want to know the future course of my life, even how I am going to die? Why? Why not?*

The Week Ahead

During this coming week, we will celebrate (again) the coming of Christ into the world on that very first Christmas.

- *How different will this year’s Christmas be in my home and the broader community, compared past Christmases?*
- *What will I do to make this Christmas as “merry” as I can for the people around me, perhaps even, virtually?*
- *What do I (yes I) want for Christmas this year?*

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend’s liturgical readings? Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues.

Suggested prompt:

- *After reflecting on this weekend’s scriptures, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn’t simply be grateful “recipients” of God’s good gifts. We also need to “give back.”

- *How will this week’s Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love, and “give back” during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Viewing / Reading

Music Video:

[Andrea Bocelli](#) and [Mary J. Blige](#) sing [“What Child Is This?”](#)

Book:

[Oneness with All Life: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose](#) by [Eckhart Tolle](#)

Inspirational selections from his earlier book, [A New Earth](#).

In Tolle’s words, the purpose of his book is to bring about a shift in consciousness—an awakening. An essential part of this awakening is the recognition of our attachment to things, the past, and enemies.

Andrew Ryder, theologian at All Hallows College in Dublin, wrote:

“While (Tolle) may not use the language of traditional Christian spirituality, (he) is very much concerned that, as we make our way through the ordinary events of the day, we keep in touch with the deepest source of our being.”

[I am currently reading this book. It’s a game-changer for anyone looking for authentic spirituality in a mixed-message society.—AJG]

Preview of Next Session

The Feast of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Genesis 15: 1-6 and 21: 1-3 “Fear not, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward great.” (Alternate reading: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14)

Psalm 105: 1-6, 8-9 “Give thanks to the Lord. Invoke his name.” (Alternate reading: Psalm 128: 1-5)

Letter to the Colossians 3:12-21 “Let the peace of Christ control your hearts.”

Luke 2: 22-40 The prophet Samuel said to Mary and Joseph: “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel.”

Closing Prayer

A modern version of Luke 1:47-52, Mary's Magnificat, as found in [The Message](#) bible (Catholic edition), translated by the late Presbyterian pastor, renowned biblical scholar, spiritual writer, and poet, [Rev. Eugene H. Peterson](#) (1932-2018).

Note: Before translating the entire Bible into English, Eugene Peterson learned Aramaic, the dialect of Hebrew spoken by most common people in biblical times. He wanted to capture the “voice” of real people, like Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The following passage is Peterson's translation of the Magnificat.

And Mary said:

I'm bursting with good news;

I'm dancing the song of my Savior God;

God took one good look at me, and look what happened—

I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What God has done for me will never be forgotten,

the God whose very name is holy,

set apart from all others.

His mercy flows in . . . wave after wave,

on those who are in awe before him.

He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.

He knocked tyrants off their horses,

pulled victims out of the mud.

The starving poor sat down to a banquet;

the callous rich were left out in the cold.

He embraced his chosen child, Israel;

he remembered and piled on the mercies,

piled them high.

It's exactly what he promised,

beginning with Abraham—and right up to now.

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)

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Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

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(follow this link to my religious novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))